



St Mary's Christian Brothers' Grammar School

**POLICY FOR RELATIONSHIPS AND
SEXUALITY EDUCATION
(RSE)**

March 2024

INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

All young people have a right to an education which adequately prepares them for adult life and quality Relationships and Sexuality Education is of paramount importance.

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is a lifelong process. Learning begins informally with parents, guardians and carers and continues throughout school and in to adult life. As young people grow and develop they need to acquire knowledge, understanding and skills and develop their own attitudes, beliefs and values, about personal and social relationships and gender issues.

At St Mary's we recognise that parents have the primary duty and right to be the first and principal educators of their children in this area. We see ourselves as supporting and helping parents to fulfil this responsibility. The attitude, beliefs and behaviour of pupils in all their relationships are primarily formed and greatly influenced by their experiences within the family and the relationship they have with their parents/guardians. RSE in school is intended therefore to supplement and complement what goes on at home.

The RSE programme in St Mary's seeks to provide young men with formal opportunities to acquire knowledge and understanding of human sexuality and relationships within a moral, spiritual and social framework which reflects the Catholic ethos of our school. The programme aims to help the students to appreciate and make informed decisions about family life, marriage and responsible parenting.

2. CONTEXT

Relationships and Sexuality is a major issue for young people. Northern Ireland has one of the highest rates of teenage pregnancy in Europe, and the incidence of Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) is rising. There is also an increasing concern over the continuing rise of HIV infection in Northern Ireland.

The media climate and culture that prevails in society is also an issue. Men and women can be promoted as sexual objects and the suggestion often made is that engaging in sexual activity carries no responsibility or consequences.

RSE looks at sexuality and sexual behaviour in a moral and spiritual context in line with the Catholic/ER ethos and values of our school as articulated in our Mission Statement.

3. POLICY FORMATION

The RSE policy was written in accordance with the guidance provided in DE circulars 2001/15, 2001/15b, 2010/10, 2013/16, 2015/22 and 2024/1. It is also written in accordance with guidance published by the Equality Commission on Eliminating Sexual Orientation Discrimination in Northern Ireland. CCEA's guidance for post primary schools on Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE Hub) and Personal Development (2007) was also used.

The policy is a key Safeguarding Policy and is closely linked to our Child Protection Policy.

4. MISSION STATEMENT AND CATHOLIC ETHOS

RSE in St Mary's is taught within the moral, spiritual and social framework that reflects the beliefs and ethos of our Catholic school. St Mary's is committed to the education and development of the whole person. As a Catholic Community, we nurture the faith and the personal development of each individual. We, like all Catholic schools, try to develop young people who are responsible and capable of making informed decisions, inspired by Catholic values.

5. MORALS AND VALUES

RSE is not intended to be value free. It should be tailored to the age, maturity and understanding of pupils. Our RSE programme therefore aims to provide information in an objective, balanced and sensitive manner, set within a clear framework of Catholic values and an awareness of the law on sexual behaviour. Pupils are encouraged to appreciate the value of family, marriage and permanent loving relationships, and the responsibilities of parenthood. They are helped to consider the importance of self-restraint, dignity, respect for themselves and others, commitment and fidelity. They are enabled to recognise the physical, emotional and moral implications and risks of certain types of behaviour and to accept that both sexes must behave responsibly in sexual matters.

Teachers responsible for delivering the programme acknowledge and recognise that many children come from backgrounds that do not reflect such values and experiences. They recognise that sensitivity is therefore needed to avoid causing hurt and offence to these children and their families, and to encourage the development of their sense of worth.

The following key messages will be promoted throughout the school:

- An appreciation of the value and sanctity of life from the moment of conception.
- An appreciation of the importance of making informed decisions about family life, marriage and permanent loving relationships based on trust and commitment.
- An appreciation that friendships and relationships should be based on self and mutual respect, honesty, trust and commitment.
- An understanding that exploitation in any friendship or relationship is wrong.
- An appreciation that self-discipline, self-restraint and non-exploitation are important values in developing responsible behaviours in sexual matters.
- A recognition of the positive benefits of a permanent committed sexual relationship with one person.
- An appreciation of the responsibilities of parenthood.
- An acknowledgement of singleness and celibacy as valuable and fulfilling options.
- A recognition that sexual abstinence before marriage is a positive and desirable option which is an achievable reality to which young people can aspire.
- Compassion, forgiveness, mercy, tolerance and care are essential dispositions to develop in relationships.
- Within relationships there should be recognition that rights, duties and responsibilities are involved.
- The promotion of respect for all individuals regardless of sexual orientation and an appreciation of the need to treat all with dignity and respect.
- The need to respect the right of others to hold different views from oneself without aggression or antagonism.

6. AIMS OF RSE

In line with our school ethos and CCEA guidelines the Relationships and Sexuality Education Programme aims to:

- Help a young person to appreciate their uniqueness and dignity as children of God.
- Help a young person to appreciate their uniqueness and full potential as human beings.
- Enable young people to appreciate sexuality as a God given gift.
- Promote a Catholic vision of sexuality that reflects selfless love, respect and commitment.
- Develop a respect for diversity and inclusion.
- Enhance the personal development, self-esteem and well-being of the young person.
- Help a young person to develop positive and respectful friendships and relationships.
- Foster an understanding of, and a positive attitude to, human sexuality and relationships in a moral, spiritual and social framework.

- Promote responsible behaviour and the ability to make informed decisions.
- Help the young person to value family life and marriage.
- Appreciate the responsibilities of parenthood.
- Promote an appreciation of the value of human life and the wonder of life.

7. OBJECTIVES OF RSE

In line with our school ethos and CCEA guidelines the Relationships and Sexuality Education Curriculum attempts to enable pupils to:

- Acquire and develop knowledge and understanding of self.
- Develop a positive sense of self-awareness, self-esteem and self-worth.
- Develop within pupils a respect for their own and other people's bodies.
- Provide opportunities for pupils to explore the moral and ethical issues surrounding sexuality.
- Develop an awareness of differing family structures.
- Become aware of the variety of ways in which individuals grow and change and understand that their developing sexuality is an important aspect of self-identity.
- Develop personal skills which will help to establish and sustain healthy personal relationships.
- Develop coping strategies to protect themselves and others from various forms of exploitation and abuse.
- Acquire and use an appropriate vocabulary to discuss feelings, sexuality and development.
- Understand human physiology with particular reference to the reproductive cycle, human fertility and sexually transmitted infections and diseases.
- Understand sexual development and identify and explore aspects of sexuality including, stereotyping, gender issues and cultural influences on sexuality. Taking account of the Equality Act (Sexuality Orientation/Regulations (NI) 2006 and The Relationships and Sexuality Education (NI) (Amendment) Regulations 2023.
- Develop skills to deal with peer pressure and influence others positively.
- Enable pupils to understand the influence that messages from their peers and the media can have on their own values.
- Prepare pupils to cope with the social, physical and emotional challenges of growing up as a means to prepare them for adult life.

8. TERMINOLOGY/DEFINITIONS RELATED TO RSE

The nature of RSE necessitates a defining of its unique terminology and an understanding of the terms used within the context of Catholic teaching:

- i. Sexuality: People are sexual beings. Sexuality is about much more than its biological aspects. It concerns the innermost being of the human person. We believe sexuality is a gift from God. It is the drive within every person to give and receive love and affection. Our sexuality shapes and permeates all our relationships.
- ii. Morality: is essentially linked with behaviour and what we do. It is also connected with experience, faith and decision making.
- iii. Ethics: are the moral principles that a person uses to guide and to judge their actions.
- iv. Values: the attitudes, beliefs, virtues and principles which inform his/her behaviour e.g. respect for self, honesty with self and others.
- v. Personal: Morality is about each of us taking responsibility for the choices we make. We endeavour to prepare our pupils to make moral decisions with an "informed conscience".

9. THE RSE CURRICULUM

The Education Order 2006 and the Education (Curriculum Minimum Content) Order (NI) 2007 requires that all schools offer a curriculum which:

- Promotes the spiritual, moral, emotional, intellectual, physical and cultural development of pupils.
- Prepares pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of life by equipping them with appropriate knowledge, understanding and skills.

In respect of Learning for Life and Work (LLW) to ensure that the pupils at key stage 3 and 4 have the opportunity to, “Receive age-appropriate, comprehensive and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights.”

Relationships and Sexual Education therefore is a statutory element of the Northern Ireland curriculum. In St Mary’s RSE will be delivered through Religion, Science and Learning for Life and Work.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Relationships are not only addressed in RSE, they are one of the three concepts explored in Personal Development. The other concepts examined are Self Awareness and Personal Health.

DELIVERY OF THE PROGRAMME

In Key Stage 3 and 4 Personal Development is taught within Learning for Life and Work classes and the Pastoral Curriculum delivered by Form Tutors in Pastoral Time one lesson per week.

10. TEACHING RSE AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

The RSE and PD programmes are developmental and the lessons and resources used are appropriate to the age and maturity of the pupils to which they are delivered. The teachers delivering the programmes deliver them with sensitivity and care. They are empathetic to the personal and emotional circumstances of individual pupils. They take in to account pupils knowledge, attitudes and beliefs and their capacity to understand issues. Particular attention is paid to children with special educational needs where physical development may outstrip emotional maturity to ensure the programmes are delivered effectively.

SPECIFIC ISSUES

The Family

The school supports and promotes the institutions of marriage and family in keeping with our Catholic ethos and value system.

The Centrality of Abstinence

In line with the School ethos and Catholic morals sexual abstinence before marriage, and fidelity within it, will be presented as a positive and desirable option and an achievable reality. Committed, permanent heterosexual relationships will be presented as the ideal context for sexual intimacy.

The Sanctity of Life

In line with the ethos of the school, the value and sanctity of life will be actively promoted. This will influence teaching on abortion and casual sex.

Sexual Orientation

In St Mary’s we believe that all students have the right to develop and to learn in a safe environment. No one in our school community will be treated unfairly, or be isolated in any way on the grounds of their sexual orientation. All members of the school community will be valued and cared for and everyone will be treated with dignity and respect.

St Mary’s has a zero tolerance policy towards bullying. Homophobic bullying, in any form, including any demonstration of negative attitudes towards lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students or those who are perceived to be such, will not be tolerated by the school and will be dealt with in line with our

Anti Bullying Policy, and takes account of the Equality Act (NI) 2006, Relationships and Sexuality Education (NI) (Amendment) 2010 Regulation 2023, Safeguarding/Child Protection Policy, Positive Behaviour Management Policy, Drug Education Policy and E-Safety Policy.

Confidentiality and Child Protection

The child's right to privacy will be respected at all times by the teacher and all other pupils in the class. However, staff cannot give any guarantee of confidentiality to pupils around issues relating to Child Protection. If details are revealed that would lead the teacher to suspect that physical or sexual abuse is involved, that teacher must follow Child Protection procedures and immediately inform the Designated Teacher for Child Protection of their concerns.

Answering Pupils' Questions

If pupils raise issues or ask questions that are offensive to some or are above the maturity level of the class, the teacher will not answer the question in class. If the teacher feels that the question was a genuine one, he/she may suggest that the pupil ask their parents. If the question asked raises Child Protection issues, this will be referred to the Designated Teacher for Child Protection.

Due to the sensitive nature of some of the issues in RSE teachers have the right to state that for personal reasons they do not wish to give a personal opinion on the issue raised.

Terminology

All staff teaching RSE related issues will use the proper biological names for body parts and sexual acts, where appropriate and relevant to the RSE programme. The use of common slang will be avoided. Parents will have an opportunity to view the programme and become familiar with the language used within it.

11. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

(1) The role of the RSE Co-ordinator and the other Key Staff:

The Pastoral Vice Principal is the RSE Co-ordinator in St Mary's. She is supported in her role by a range of other staff who contribute:

- Vice Principal – Curriculum
- SENCO
- Designated Teacher for Child Protection (Vice Principal – Pastoral)
- Deputy Designated Teachers for Child Protection (Senior Teachers X 3)
- Head of Department for Religion
- Head of Department for Science
- Head of Department for Learning for Life and Work

Key staff, led by the Vice Principal (Pastoral) are responsible for co-ordinating all issues relating to the RSE Policy and RSE programme development.

The Vice Principal (Pastoral) will:

- Ensure that the RSE programme is taught effectively and is appropriate to the age and maturity of the pupils.
- Liaise with the Principal, Board of Governors, all staff, parents, health and educational visitors on RSE matters.
- Attend in-service training and disseminate appropriate information to other staff members.
- Organise training for staff as and when appropriate.
- Liaise with outside agencies for curriculum purposes.

Staff Training:

This will be organised by the RSE co-ordinator, in consultation with the Principal and the Senior Leadership Team. Where appropriate The Belfast Trust's Sexual Health Team, EA Advisors, or the Diocesan Advisers will be involved.

(2) The role of parents:

St Mary's believe that the responsibility for Relationships and Sexual Education is shared between teachers and parents and that its effectiveness depends on a collaborative process involving teachers, parents and other educational and health professionals. We recognise that each of the partners has a distinctive contribution to make.

Whilst the classroom teacher has a significant role to play in the implementation of RSE in school, this role will not be considered in isolation to the role of parents as the teacher's role will ideally be additional and complementary to the parents.

Withdrawal from class:

There is a statutory parental right to withdraw a child from classes in RSE, the school will try to take account of any parental concerns raised and will, as far as possible, make alternative arrangements for any pupil whose parent wishes him to be excused from particular, or all, RSE classes. A pupil may be excused if a parent makes a written request to the school where the parent considers the education is against their wishes.

12. RESOURCES AND OUTSIDE AGENCIES**The Use of Resources**

All resources (books, DVD's, videos, TV programmes, internet sites, CD ROMs etc.) will be vetted before use by the Safeguarding Team to ensure they are consistent with the school's policy and ethos.

The Use of Outside Agencies

We recognise the importance of ensuring that any external agencies used to support the delivery of Relationships and Sexual Education must adhere to the values and ethos of our school. When Education and/or Health professionals from statutory or voluntary organisations are invited into our school, the activities which the agency or individuals deliver always complement the ongoing RSE curriculum. Care is taken to ensure that the education and health professionals have read, and are willing, to comply with our school RSE policy, and that they know what has been taught in preparation for their visit and what will be done as a follow-up to it.

Note the teacher will always be present when an individual from an external agency is taking a class.

13. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The RSE policy will be reviewed and updated regularly.

The RSE co-ordinator will work with teachers to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness and relevance of the programme on an ongoing basis. The evaluation will be based on teacher feedback as well as feedback from pupils and parents. The information gained will be collated by the RSE co-ordinator and used to adapt the programme for the future.